

EDWARD FAIRFAX'S TIMELESS CLASSIC
A BRIEF HISTORY OF FUZZY SUBSETS:
THE LIFE OF EDWARD FAIRFAX,
NEWLY REVISED 'HOSTILE'
25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
as edited by Canyon Frost,
Formerly Edward Fairfax's Timeless Classic
Strange Winds: The Life of Edward Fairfax,
as edited by Canyon Frost

Edward Fairfax
ed. Canyon Frost

NEW PACKAGE
SAME GREAT PRODUCT!

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Note to the reader:

This work contains graphic violence, sex, and sexual violence, as well as strong language and disturbing imagery. If you think you might be triggered by any of the above, consider carefully before reading on.

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Part I

Frontsmatter

Chapter 1

Prologue

A Preface to the ‘Hostile’ 25th Anniversary Edition

In which the 25th Anniversary Edition and the narrator are introduced.

OF COURSE YOU ALL ALREADY KNOW ALL THIS or you wouldn’t be reading it at all. What are the odds, after all, that you are going to go through the same contortions of fate that I have – that you too have picked this up by unhappy accident, an unknowing mistake or a twist of cruel destiny which you will forever remember and curse?

A joke, of course. My little joke. I don’t have many, and they’re all rather small, so the ones I have I cherish almost beyond belief and try to spread as far and wide as I can so as to propagate the species, ensure its continued survival, live on long after its creator -s but I digress. There is important work to be done, on your part and mine, and some great stuff ahead of you. It’s life-changing. It certainly changed mine.

I first read *Fuzzy Subsets/Strange Winds* when I was just a mediocre English major looking for more weighty and pretentious volumes to add to my collection. Gaddis was out, too difficult, which especially hurt because I saw my ex hanging out with some grad student reading *Carpenter’s Gothic* and I knew I needed some impressive book, any impressive book, to hold snootily as I walked by them in a coffee shop, appearing not to care about anything unless in a self-aware, postmodern, ironic sort of way. Unfortunately, the bookstore was all out of such things, so I had to settle for this. I simply picked up the heftiest one I could find with an unfamiliar

(but not ridiculous) title. I had never heard of it. After I read a bit, and asked around, I found that I had never heard of anyone who had heard of it. I called up the publisher (now sadly out of business) and found out that the initial printing was only 1000 copies, few of which sold.

What started as irony and pretension quickly turned into obsession and actual, sincere enjoyment as I realized what it was that I was reading. It was a struggle, but that's why we're English majors. I live for this stuff. I love it. I love this.

I wasn't the only one – my professor, as I'm sure you know by now, was enthralled by my thesis on *Fuzzy Subsets/Strange Winds*, so much so that he asked to read the book itself. He loved the original even more, introduced it to his fellow professors and literary friends and whatever, and the rest, as a more hackneyed preface-writer would say, is history.

So that's how this marvelous piece of work got into the hands of you, the reader. But enough with my story, and on to the real one. We have, included here in this new and definitive 'Hostile' 25th Anniversary Edition only, laboriously restored from the original gallery proofs, minus the post-mortem edits made by Mrs Fairfax and several other friends and family comprising a group of well-meaning but ultimately terrible editors (excepting, of course, the bulk of '89/789', which is likely lost forever. We have included herein what little we have in the spirit of completeness, but readers should take into account that this is a fundamentally damaged piece, and not necessarily legible in the traditional sense.), with all intended hyperlinks and nested footnotes, and, as a special treat, some of the commentary from the first draft of my thesis, adding helpful hints where the prose is particularly dense. While we can't know exactly what was going through Fairfax's mind as he wrote *Fuzzy Subsets/Strange Winds*, the greatest pains have been taken to follow through on what seems to have been his intent.

I know you'll love this as much as I did,
Canyon Frost
September 17, 2011

Chapter 2

Epitaph

In which quotations which may become more relevant to the reader's analysis of the novel as they progress are introduced.

: so He.

Browning

Most of his work was recovered
and is still spoken of, when noted, with high regard,
though seldom played.

Gaddis

What we've got here is a failure to communicate.

Pierce¹

¹My father always said that the purpose of writing is to communicate, and if you can't effectively convey ideas with your writing, you are a bad writer and need to start over again, or, preferably, stop writing altogether.

Part II

$$I_P = \sum_{i=1}^n m_i r_i^2$$

Chapter 3

I

In which the hero is introduced.

“CHEVY ROGERS STOOD BEFORE THE WHORE IN THE alleyway wearing his jacket.¹ He liked his jacket, and did not want it dirtied by the generally dirty ways of whores and their alleyways in general. To prevent its creamy white leather from being smudged he ~~unzipped~~ unbuttoned² it³ and hung it on a post that seemed to have been installed for just that purpose.⁵

¹He was not sure who was wearing the jacket - him? Her? The alleyway? – But then, uncertainty, lexical or otherwise, was the mode for him.

²This is undoubtedly one of the more opaque phrases in the work. Hundreds of pages of analysis have been written about the crossed-out word “unzipped”. Of course, a varsity jacket of the sort that Chevy is no doubt wearing does feature snap-buttons instead of a zipper, so it makes sense that Fairfax would write “unbuttoned”- but why keep in the previous version, if indeed it was previous at all? A close comparison of his working drafts reveals that the crossed-out word was added fairly “late in the game”, as it were, added as a crossed-out word. Any curious reader can easily find the volumes of additional insight into this puzzling and enchanting phrase.

³Aha! That’s where it⁴ was.

⁴The jacket.

⁵It⁶ had been. Laureen Cowper⁷ was a conscientious whore⁸ who tried to keep as clean and hygienic as humanly possible.

⁶The pole.

⁷The whore.

⁸Whoops! I guess that one was unnecessary. Do try to avoid it in your memory, and think not the less of me for it.⁹

⁹We understand your confusion, if it is at all present. You have only just started, and there’s more aside than plot. Also, you are being directly addressed by some narrator

“She looked at him¹⁰ and he looked at her. Words needed not be said - and yet, were.¹⁵

“He said,¹⁶ ‘How much is it, again?’

“Don’t worry. I give group rates, and you’ve already been paid for,’ she said.

“‘Really?’ he said.

“‘Yeah, your friend is covering you. That’s nice.’ she said.

“‘Oh,’ he said. ‘Well.’

“‘Well,’ she said. ‘We’d better get started.’ Slowly she approached. Their orifices met, clumsily.”

“Oh, god, Dad, why would you tell me that?” asked the boy. He swatted at a gray blur in the air.

“Well, y’know, you’re getting old. Almost a man. I feel you’re mature enough to handle my little stories.”

“Oh,” said the boy.

“Yes,” said the man. “Fuck! Another one!” He swatted at a gray blur in the air.

who appears to have no character or tone in the story itself, which is, to be honest, really pretty dry. All of this could quite reasonably shatter your suspension of disbelief, or, at the very least, your tolerance for whimsy. I’m really quite sorry, and I want to inform you now that I’ll only be telling this story in an unobtrusive way - classic mimesis - no more interruptions.

¹⁰With what a more fanciful (and also clichéd) narrator might call “come hither” or “bedroom” eyes.¹¹

¹¹Sorry! Slipped my mind. Fuck.¹²

¹²Damn, I shouldn’t have apologized via nested footnote, but rather through the mail, or in person, like some normal person. If you really would like me to apologize in person, and also meet a minor celebrity (that is, me), and you’re a reasonably attractive, flexible, slightly-kinky, bookish girl named Anne currently living in or around the Greater Los Angeles area (location to be updated if I move)¹³ or willing to travel there for a cup of coffee and a long-overdue apology, I will gladly get together. If you are only one of those things, PM me and I’ll see if I’m interested. If you are not even human, I could use another cat.¹⁴

¹³Not to worry, this is a living document that will change as I do, so it’s totally worth the cost of admission, which, now that you mention it, is zero.

¹⁴It’s all just sort of the point.

¹⁵Words need not be written, and yet, will be.

¹⁶The details of the conversation are far too tedious to be worth the time and effort of recounting them here. Perhaps, had they been more interesting, I might have, but they were not, so. I did not.

The man removed a can of beans from the pantry and set it down on the ground. The beans were in a red tin with pictures of beans on the side, glued to it.

The can was old, and there were gray smears on the top and sides. Dust had collected in the ridges of the tin, underneath the picture of the beans.

The boy took a can of beans from the pantry and set it down on the ground. The beans were in a red tin with pictures of beans on the side, glued to it.

The can was old, and there was a gray smear on the top. Dust had collected in the ridges of the tin, underneath the picture of the beans.

“So,” he asked, “is that it?”

“Is what it?” asked the man.

“That. The story. Is that all there is to it?”

“I thought you were disgusted with my foul tongue and subject matter,” said the man.

After some further conversation, he resumed the telling.

“‘Squish squash,’ said the orifices in unison.”

“Dad!” said the boy.

“Chevy Rogers completed lustily and collapsed onto Laureen¹⁷ Cowper’s supine body.

“‘Gasp!’ he gasped. Chevy was breathing hard and slightly shaking as he got up and offered Laureen Cowper a hand. She took it. Chevy walked out of the alley. The crowd of young men around him cheered and slapped

¹⁷The whore.

him on the back.¹⁸

“One tossed him a football, the object of his affection, which he caught, clumsily.²⁴ ——— mentioned that Chevy was shivering and asked if it was ‘cause of the weather or his times with the whore.

“‘Drat!’ said Chevy. ‘I left my jacket on a peg in her alleyway. I’ll have to go get it.’

“There was no resistance to the idea that Chevy losing his jacket just hours before the big game would not have any sort of positive influence on his playing ability, so he went into the alleyway to grab his jacket off the post in the alleyway. He did so as quietly as possible, to avoid disturbing the occupants. ——— was pulling on Lauren Cowper’s hair as he rode her from behind, and sneering the while. Her hat was gone and her hair was disheveled. Every so often, he kneed her in the ribs and ordered her to neigh, as if she were a horse. She neighed, cheeks flushed. Despite best

¹⁸In 1963 the Beach Boys recorded the song “Be True to Your School”, allegedly a beach-rock anthem promoting wholesome values.¹⁹ Chevy and the gang did not have access to this song, but they certainly had access to school spirit. Every one of them played football,²¹ and among football players, Chevy Rogers²³ reigned fitfully as king.

¹⁹Fair warning: I say allegedly because I have not listened to this song recently enough to remember anything about it, other than its arboreal color scheme and that it most likely contains the kind of harmonizing the Beach Boys were known for. Furthermore, there’s no fucking way I’m going to listen to shitty 1960s pop for a story, so curious readers will have to investigate the song independently.²⁰

²⁰I probably should, and I definitely could, but I just uninstalled Adblock Plus, because I felt bad about using all my favorite sites without making them any money (and porn sites really need to spend on all that server space), and there was this really annoying, raucous, guitar-playing ad before the video, so I quickly copied the link and fled before I got to the actual song.

²¹When I was a boy in the Great Depression, we had no tvs or games or even food with which to amuse ourselves, so instead everybody played sports. I always wanted to be a quarterback,²² but alas, my arm has been crippled since birth, and I am not destined for athletic fame.

²²To be truly honest (and this is, again, a memoir above all else, written for myself, so why would I lie?), I would not have wanted to play if I had been left on my own. My father, however, a latter-day John Muir, was great big bear of a man who delighted in the outdoors and often tried to sway me into hiking with him. My poor asthmatic lungs could not keep up, and every jaunt ended the same way: with me, curled up on the ground, wheezing.

²³The hero of the story, I suppose. If you can call it a story. If you can call him a hero.

²⁴Chevy’s a quarterback, not a receiver or anything like that. So, I guess he doesn’t really need to be able to catch? I’m just reporting the facts. I can’t really account for Chevy’s fumbling of the ball, and I wasn’t around to attest to his skill catching footballs on any other occasion.

efforts to the contrary, ——— noticed Chevy creeping along the center of the alleyway and rose to greet him. Chevy attempted to avoid looking at his teammate's dangling shame."

The man smacked a wall that had previously featured a gray blur but now only had a gray smear upon it. Tiny wings lay amidst the vertical pool of organic residue. Two wings. It was dead.

"Chevy took his jacket off of the pole in the alleyway and exited.

"He walked home and showered before putting on a tuxedo.²⁵ As the water fell on him, he winced, stretching out his sore muscles and feeling the impact bruises on and under his skin.

"Chevy Rogers played football.²⁷

"During the night he returned to his bedroom, a girl in tow. She was wearing a floor-length dress and a flower that was strapped to her wrist. The two spoke quietly.

"I love you, and I'm glad we waited. Aren't you?"

"What?"

"Glad we waited to have sex."

"Oh, yes."

"Are you alright?"

"I'm fine, thanks. Just a little nervous."

"Me too. But this will be fine. Better than fine. I'm sorry, I'm making this awkward."

"No, you're not. It's fine. Come here."

"In the dark, he did not know whether or not she had, but he plunged forth valiantly, regardless.

"After, Chevy lay still, looking up at the blank beige ceiling above him. He was not sure what he had expected, but he felt nothing at all. She was silent beside him. Despite her organizing the affair,²⁸ she had acted coy throughout, and resisted him. Her face had been a rictus of perserverance, if such a thing is possible, and she had stopped him before he could turn on a light. Now, when all the boundaries between them were broken, she

²⁵One of those horrible polyester ones, with a full vest (faux-silk or -grosgrain) instead of a proper tuxedo style, meant to match with the dress but instead making the wearer look both washed-out and slightly blue-green, since you asked.²⁶

²⁶I know you didn't.

²⁷Yes.

²⁸For Chevy Rogers was not organized and could not have done this feat alone.

covered her nakedness with his green bed sheets, and snuffled softly into his arm. That, he supposed, was what women did.”

“Is it?” asked the boy.

“I don’t feel comfortable having that conversation with you,” said the man. “But no.”

“Laureen Cowper stopped. She did not feel comfortable.

“‘I don’t feel comfortable,’ she said. ‘I’m not going to do this.’

“‘But we paid you,’ said Chevy.

“‘I’m doing this for you,’ said Laureen. ‘I don’t think you want this. Not like this.’

“‘What would you know about what I want?’ he asked.

“‘Maybe I’m wrong, and maybe you’re an absolute Casanova, a marvelous Don Juan, the epitome of a lover. But I’m not wrong. You are nervous and you don’t want to do this.’

“‘Ok,’ said Chevy. ‘I don’t. But what will the others think?’

“‘Nothing,’ she said, ‘if you don’t leave just now. Stay a while. We can talk or something.’

“Chevy Rogers had never just talked before. His brow furrowed.

“‘Ok,’ he said. ‘Tell me about yourself.’

“She did.²⁹

“‘Do you want to hear my story?’ he asked.

“‘I think I already have,’ she said, ‘but I’ll listen anyways.’

“Chevy talked, but for a much shorter time than Laureen. There was less to tell.³⁰ After, he felt better.

“‘He sounds like an awful friend. Why did you come?’ she said.

“‘How could I not? I didn’t really have a choice.’ he said.

“‘Oh. Well . . . That makes sense.’ she said.

“‘How do you feel?’

“‘Nothing at all.’

“‘What?’

“‘He tried to explain. She lay there awhile after he finished in silence.

“‘That’s not what I meant. Go to sleep.’

²⁹I will not recount the intimate history of a remarkable and sensitive women, even if she is a common street whore, to a flock of anonymous listeners simply for their voyeuristic pleasure. Fuck off if that’s too much to handle. All you need to know is that she and Chevy talked, and she told him her story, which was likely pretty tragic.

³⁰It was, however, to a certain type of person, probably male, in their late teens, feeling both hollowed-out and jaded, equally tragic as her story, if not more so.

“She did. After some time he rose and dressed and left the house.”

Chapter 4

II

In which the hero searches for companionship and some semblance of meaning in that dreary mess known as life.

THEN HE WALKS THE DARK CORRIDORS OF THE alone with no others without or within walks on lonely pavements with the road sloping gently alone away in all directions all things far and yet all so approaching on this road where all things lie all roads lead to Rome."

"Cur?"

"Hahaha!"

"as the light fades from eyes the woman the dog's eyes would not close as as as are you okay yes yes of course just need just need if I can only just please get some air

Well. That's quite enough of that. Too much moth-killer - I thought it said non-toxic or whatever."

"He goes he goes he goes and sees off there in the dark some light not so far away that it is too far but rather just far enough so that he can walk there to the light.

"The light is for a QuickTrip burning into the night sky where there is one inside attending to things with no customers. He goes in.

"There is no one inside.

"On he goes and on as it falls suffocating in a cloak gathered around pressing down and falls and chokes as tears as tears chokes is alone knows what you mean knows exactly what you mean lights coming whirling blaring sirens whats wrong sir is that blood sir you need to you need

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Chapter 5

III

In which the hero's quest is ended.

“Some smiles show cheer; some merely show teeth.”

WHILE SHE SLEEPS I LIKE TO PLACE MY FINGERTIPS on her eyelids and press with slowly increasing pressure until she wakes up at which point I turn over and feign continued sleep. She does not know it yet but I have desensitized her and I am on the verge of detaching her cornea and letting it float free on the oculus where she will blink in confusion feeling a loosening and a pop blinks and it falls out onto the sheet. She doesn't suspect a thing.

I am not made for this world.

Up out to world bright new day stretching she yawns says good morning I respond. Seam in stomach itches can hear the tearing but don't scratch it. There is no sun in the sky. I look out onto the sunless morning and I know that it is today. Today is it.

I tell her to go back to sleep because it is not yet morning and she does. I leave the house and go to the store. I sigh. I talk to the pretty girl. I have seen her earlier. Giddyup. I shrug my shoulders and leave confident that they are gone too and that another corner of the world has been neatened. It did not matter anyhow because why would it matter. Why. It is not as if they are real. I am not able to talk to them.

As she sleeps I lean down over her. My fingers itch.

I leave the house and go to the store.

Part III

$$\oiint_{\partial\Omega} \vec{B} \cdot d\vec{A} = 0$$

Chapter 6

The Hat

In which we see what a character tangentially related to the hero was up to for all that time.

“THE COLD CLEAR WIND CROSSED THE COUNTY BORDER five miles south of Ipskegawawa City before swooshing off to parts unknown, giving it just the right timing to blow the hat off the head of Laureen Cowper, independant business-woman.¹ Ms Cowper, ravishing still at her advanced age, lonely after the war, and hiding what would turn out to be a syph rash from her bemused client, tried violently to seize it from the offending zephyrs, but was stymied, as her midsection was pinioned to the ground by those most intrusive of organs.² Between them was a genital, which was inside of her.

“Where are you going?” said the owner of the hands, a beefy, cherubic young man with bright prospects and shaving cream behind his ear.

“My hat!’ she said. ‘I knew I should have pinned it!’

“The owner chuckled and thrust vigorously. When he reached for her chest, she slapped his hands away and rolled him onto his back, looking forlornly down the alleyway for her hat.

“Look, will you! It’s already ten meters down.’ she said.

“As Laureen Cowper struggled to dismount, the hands clasped onto her hips and rolled her once more onto her back. White globes gleamed in the

¹Read: whore.

²Read: hands.

setting sun. He cried out mightily. After a moment of silence³ she trailed a hand down his back, wriggled, and crawled out a free woman.

“Way to go, stud,” she said. ‘Now I’m going to go get my hat from God-only-knows-where, and you can clear out so that when I come back, there is room for more clientele.’⁶

“He checked his reflection in the single grimy window, grinned and wiped away the shaving cream.

“With that said he frog-marched her out of the alley and into a darkening main drag where a group of like-minded young men in jerseys milled about. They laughed and shook his hand before clapping one of their number on the back and sending him into the alley, accompanied by the prostitute and jeers. As the catcalls died down, the only boy not to have gone in, a short, pudgy boy with edged up to the recent occupant and asked after the relative tightness of certain orifices.

“Jesus, Dale, I don’t remember if she’s tighter than Jenny! How would - why the fuck - no!” he said.

“To the boy’s horror, the response was screeched rather than whispered back to him. The rest of the team listened, hushed. News of Dale’s sexual sexual prowess⁷ had issued forth from more than just Dale. Richard ‘Dickie’ Pryce was well-known to be the home-wrecker behind the Jenny-Dale breakup. Since then, Dickie had been regaling the team with amusing anecdotes of various fumbles and ineptitudes.⁸

“Look, Dickie, I just need to know, ok? Jenny just sort of lay there, and she was so tight, I just couldn’t keep going. She always said it hurt, but I thought that that was just the first time.’ Dale said. He looked down. ‘It’s just. . . if I don’t last long, with all the guys just outside, everyone will know.’

³Awkward, it seemed, only for a small fraction⁴ of the current occupants of the alleyway.

⁴One-eighteenth,⁵ to be exact.

⁵In addition to the whore and her client, there were quite a few winged beasts buzzing about making nuisances of themselves.

⁶She liked to use words with Frankish roots to project an air of class onto the enterprise that she felt was otherwise absent.

⁷Or, rather, lack thereof.

⁸Dale’s ineptitude, not Dickie’s. That needs to be made more clear – after all, clarity is the point, right?⁹

⁹Right?

“Dickie, sophisticated man-about-town, laid a paternal paw on his glum compatriot, thinking: ‘They already do, you poor fuck.’

He came out of the alley and a football was tossed to him.

Laureen stumbled through the dry earth looking at her hat just a few meters too far and consistently being borne away by the ever-present wind.

“Doesn’t anybody have values anymore? Jesus fuck, what happened to America? What happened to standing for something more?” he said.

He swatted at a moth.¹⁰

“I don’t follow,” the boy said.

“In the fullness of time Dickie went back in the alley and so did he.

“In the fullness of time Laureen Cowper¹³ gave up the hunt for her hat and went instead to get a bite to eat.

“What happened to being the bigger, better person? I believe in it. Think me a fool if you want.” he said.

The boy frowned and continued to spray the cans of beans.

“She decided that she was not so hungry that she needed to go to one of the fifties-style diners dotting the country¹⁴ and instead could have a snack at a convenience store. By this time night had fallen.

“but goddamn if I believe in anything I believe in America. It’s not perfect but it’s better than the rest. If you could give all the world’s nuclear weapons to one country, which one would it be?”

“Dale sat behind the counter. He blushed as he saw who it was that was entering.

“Isn’t there some dance or something you ought to be at tonight?”

“I had to work.’

¹⁰Moths and flies symbolize decay.¹¹

¹¹I cried when I first saw that footnote.¹²

¹²Fairfax wrote that, but the logic behind it is not wrong. Previously there had been no footnotes in what has been called, for obvious reasons, the “Janie Neal Hurston” sections of the story – it would not be unreasonable to assume that the footnotes were, for the most part, the father’s digressions, and he is the one telling the story. The footnote on this section is terrifying because it means that the “Janie Neal Hurston” section is synthetic as well. It too is a story being told. The ramifications of this to the reader need not be detailed here, but there are now dozens of works (not so many, perhaps, as there are analyzing the famous, or, rather, infamous “button phrase,” but still many indeed) on the subject.

¹³The whore.

¹⁴This raises a question as to the exact time of the story – but the answer is, sadly, beyond the scope of this footnote, and shall have to be investigated independently by the interested reader.

Chapter 7

Three Days Out

In which chaos reigns.

THOU THOUGHTTEST THAT I WAS ALTOGETHER SUCH A one as thyself.

— —, —
Aboard the HMS *Bellipotent*

Dearest one,

I have met with the crew, and they seem to be of fine make and spirit. We are about to set sail from —, on what I hope will be a voyage of both excellent profit and adventure. It appears that, as we are going out to sea, I will not be able to write you for some time, but I shall continue to do so, keeping a sort of “logbook” of my activities, in the hopes that they shall be entertaining to you, whensoever as they do reach your shores.

I do not have very long before we - I suppose the sailors call it “raise the gangplank” or somesuch - depart, so I am afraid this missive must be kept brief, which causes me no end of regret, considering it will, as I have already explained, be the last that you shall receive for some time. To preclude any nervous feeling on your part, and to almost place you aboard the ship, as it were, I will endeavor to describe the locale and crew to the best of my ability in the time I have remaining.

The ship appears to my “landlubber” (as the sailors call me) eyes as to be an average specimen of those I have observed of similar purpose. Its

only real distinguishing feature is a strange sort of door in the middle of the deck, which almost resembles a trapdoor, in that it opens downwards, not laterally, but is clearly of too ornate a design as to warrant such a title. It is perhaps carved from solid ebony planks, each one much taller than I am, and seemingly free of all flaws. I have not yet been able to ascertain the purpose of the door, but a trip below decks has revealed to me some sort of metal cage, shrouded in a heavy cloth, directly below where the doors must open. Needless to say this has only excited my curiosity further, as I cannot imagine any practical use for such contrivances aboard a sailing vessel.

But that is all the time I have, and I have not yet even begun to describe the individual crewmembers! Perhaps, should we pass another ship bound in your direction, I shall entrust the captain with my letters for you, so that you are not kept waiting.

All my love,

Aboard the HMS *Bellipotent*

My love,

I am so sorry that I was not able to deliver my letter! Just as I was handing it off to —, wishing him farewell, a sudden breeze arose and snatched the paper out of his hands. I fear that it is lost to you forever, but I have instructed — to convey my feelings to you, so that you will not think me such a horrid boor as to catch one sight of the sort of women who congregate around the docks, and forget about you forever. I am ever yours.

We have been out of the harbor for half a day now, and already I have lost sight of the mainland. The sailors are saying we have had amazing luck in terms of meteorological phenomena, and enact funny rituals, some sort of barbaric paganism, perhaps of the sort practiced by the Typees, in the hopes that the winds will continue blowing strongly. For myself, as a man who does not hold truck with any of that kind of superstitious nonsense, I believe in standard weather patterns, and it appears to me, if I can remember my education correctly, to be an uncommon but not altogether rare prevailing wind heralding a low-pressure zone and a storm on the mainland, as is common following a summer such as we have just experienced. If I am correct in my recollections and calculations, this wind will continue, and compel us to our destination in a matter for weeks. Therefore, it seems you will be hearing from me much sooner than either of us can expect.

In my last note I promised I would describe the crew to you, and I shall now try to do so. I have made a few friends, or at the very least amicable acquaintances, out of the chaplain and the first mate, both of whom were very kind and understanding in regards to a bout of seasickness I endured on first encountering the open ocean. I am not altogether sure I would be intimate with the first mate were we meeting on land, but the chaplain is the civilized sort of man whose manners have not been warped by the salty spray of the sea in the many-month voyages he must embark upon whilst only in the company of young and rowdy men. I do believe, if he is ever in the vicinity, I might have him over for dinner, or at the very least tea and a chat. I must confess I would not do the same with the first mate, as I believe his casual language would curdle your ears and sensibilities. He is the old sort of sea-man who has been cured almost leather-hard by the

ever-present ocean about him, so, while I am appalled by the manner in which he speaks, his stories are, when not totally bawdy and lacking in all redeeming value, full of the sort of wisdom one commonly finds among older men of the lower classes, who have survived an improbable length of time in a harsh and unforgiving industry, so I do enjoy, in a way, our conversations- or at least, I feel that a less-civilized, brutish side to me is edified by his naturalistic instruction.

As to the rest of the crew, I have kept far away from them, unless I am participating in one of the first mate's stories, or the chaplain is delivering a sermon. They appear to me to be hopelessly uncivilized, walking about half-undressed and using all manner of language. I must confess to blushing several times on overhearing, quite by accident, some of the tales they tell of their exploits, and I found myself contemplating if several of their boasts are legal, or even possible to the human physique.

Finally, the captain, whom I have been told by books I have read of the sea, ought to be a visible presence aboard the ship, I have seen not at all of. He has remained confined to his quarters in silence, and issues commands through the first mate.

This is the sum total of my observations of the ship and her crew thus far in the voyage. I hope this letter finds you at some point, and, for safekeeping, I am stowing it and the other letters secretly in my bunk.

All my love,

*Aboard the HMS *Bellipotent**

Darling,

We are now, as of two minutes ago, three days out into the open ocean, and I must regret not having written you sooner. In order to make up for my inadvertently taciturn behavior, I will make this letter very long indeed, filling you in on all the fascinating details of my voyage.

Today, I think, I will finally meet the captain. I have heard rumors that he has some sort of speech to give to the crew and passengers, and everyone seems to be very excited. This, however, has given rise to a troubling question for me, namely: How many in the crew have actually seen the captain in person? I am certain that almost none of the deck hands nor the cabin boys have laid eyes on the man, or they would not buzz so when they learn of his address. The obvious conclusions are that either the vast majority of the crew has little to no experience aboard this vessel, that perhaps they have little to no experience aboard vessels in general, or that the captain is so new to sailing as to have acquired no actual fame but a great deal of reputation. It would do a man I have yet to meet injustice to gossip about him, but I think it must be said that the possibility that the captain is merely such rich young lad captaining a boat for a lark looms large. Yet, I know and I trust the first mate, and he seems to place his trust in the captain, and I would not think him half so mercantile to allow his goodwill to be bought.

I am afraid I will have little else to report until I have listened to whatever speech the captain is going to make, so I shall resume writing later today.

I must admit my shame at my previous talk of our “skipper”, as the sailors call him. Having met the man I can attest to his verve, his quick wit, his forthrightness, and his zeal. There is a stereotype that sailors are uneducated and ill given to speeches, but if the captain had not attended some premier college, I would be surprised. His tone and words are equally matched in excellence, and he described our mission clearly and yet enthusiastically.

As a side note, I have learned why the crew knew so little of the man. He really is, I gather, a famous captain, although I personally do not keep up with such things, and I could say that his name was at the very least familiar to me, but I do not think I could place where I had heard it before.

On his last voyage, there was some sort of terrible sailing accident, and the majority of his crew had perished. Therefore, he was forced to hire relative strangers, but, being a prudent and now cautious man, did so from other vessels, to which his fame had of course spread long ago, resulting in a steady stream of willing and able recruits.

I have just looked over what I have written, and I must sound like a person slavishly devoted to the captain, as if transfixed. Nothing could be further from the truth. Personally I do not like him, but he has a certain magnetic appeal, which makes it hard to justify this feeling, and harder still to stay away from him. Perhaps my dislike is due to my prejudice against all men of his generation: I find them far too bloodthirsty and radical from the various conflicts they have faced in order to truly enjoy their company. I do not know if the captain has fought in any of the more recent wars, and I shall not ask him, but I would be surprised if he had not. He has that military air to him that I am not fond of. But that is perhaps the only complaint I can lodge against his character, and it is, rationally, a minor one.

Today another mystery has been, if not solved, than certainly made the more intriguing. A complex series of pulleys and levers has been erected on the deck around the door, and a great number of ropes have been affixed to what I had previously thought merely ornamental carvings in the great slabs of wood. I am not yet sure what the purpose of the door is, but I think in due time it will be opened and all shall be revealed.

The wind continues blowing ever harder, just I have predicted, surely not the result of any sort of pagan rituals. At this rate my journey will be over and done with momentarily.

All my love,

Aboard the HMSBellipotent

Saw a whale today. Very exciting! The first mate says we may deviate from course a bit to chase after it. I must confess that I am not sure how efficacious a vessel such as ours would be in the industry of whaling, but then, I suppose, I am not a whaler.

Aboard the HMS Bellipotent

We have been dragging a whale-carcass in the water behind us for several days now. Miraculously, there have not been the vast number of sharks or some other aqueous carnivores eating it, as I would have predicted. This is not the only strange occurrence aboard the vessel. My curiosity has been piqued by a series of unlikely events, which I shall describe to you:

First, and most important, I am growing aware of some discontent among the sailors. I sense a great deal of tension when I go below decks, and I have a feeling as if there was a sudden silence, just before I had arrived. It appears that, despite the stiff breeze at our backs, the ship is not actually going anywhere. I am not entirely sure how such a thing is even remotely possible, but then, I suppose, I am not a sailor. If the captain says we are not moving, I believe him. As to the discontent - our supplies are running low. They are not, thankfully, close to exhaustion, and we are not in danger of starving or dehydrating, but it is low enough as to be worrying to the hapless passenger. The chaplain tells me that this is not such an uncommon occurrence as one would imagine, and that I should relax, but I have heard whispers. One brave sailor even petitioned the first mate to plead with the captain to get rid of the cage. He said that the ship was riding too low in the water, and that, perhaps, were it lighter, we might move. Whether or not the first mate entertained the notion is beyond the scope of my knowledge, but I have not heard it mentioned again.

Secondly, despite the almost total lack of movement, we have stumbled upon the sort of tropical island read about in adventure stories. The islands were densely wooded with an assortment of flora that was quite foreign to me, but seemed to be wholly devoid of life. There are a number of strange rocky outcroppings on the isle that form naturally a series of archways and tunnels about the place. While the island itself is quite small, the tunnels are extensive, and I regret that we sailed on before I had a good chance to map the place. The captain did not leave his ship on this excursion, but invited me to dine with him in his private quarters whence I returned, and listened eagerly to my report of the minor adventure.

Finally, when the vessel had once again set sail, we encountered the strangest sort of school of fish that I have ever laid eyes on. You know me to be not over-familiar with the ocean, or indeed water in general, but as a learned man I would like to think that I have some knowledge of most of the kinds of life upon this Earth, but the sight of the fish struck me

dumb. Even now, I cannot convey the majesty or the profound strangeness of them in words. I am not sure it would be possible at all, even for a master of the craft. Suffice to say they were odd.

One of the sailors, a particularly vile specimen, truly a natural depravity, if I do say so myself, (and, it seems, I have indeed said so) tried to harpoon one of them, and the first mate had him thrown in the brig.

Bellipotent

The fog has cleared, and, while the wind is no longer quite so strong, the acceleration of the vessel is tangible. We have encountered another ship, the HMS *Indomitable*, and are hailing them as I write. Further bulletins pending.

I am not altogether sure what to report of my meeting with the crew of the HMS *Indomitable*. On inspection they were all ashen-faced and grave, and quite taciturn as well. As I am, as you know, not a naturally verbose man myself, this would normally suit me, but there was something disquieting about the way they stared at me, almost- and I really do hesitate to use this word- wistfully, but then, they were so inscrutable that there is really no way to be sure what thought went on behind those inky eyes- what I am really trying to say is, it is d-n'd near difficult - and I beg of you, please excuse the language I employ, as I am, as I write this, not feeling altogether myself- to describe how they looked and acted! They were, however, the cleanest bunch of sailors I have ever laid eyes on.

The crew of the HMS *Indomitable* had something interesting to report, in regards to our mission, but I dare not commit it to writing. Suffice to say that I believe the relaxed portion of the voyage is nearing a close. I feel as if we are rounding some sort of corner, if such a thing were possible when out at sea.

After having reviewed what I had just written, I sat down to an extremely pleasant luncheon with the chaplain and the first mate, and we discussed the strange phenomena that had occurred throughout the voyage thus far. I think it is only right and proper that the first mate of a ship should be a sort of reflection or microcosm of the crew of said ship, and, indeed, the first mate seemed rather tense. His salt-stained brown was furrowed as we talked, and I detected that when he swore, he did so with less than his customary exuberance. By contrast, the chaplain has only gained in energy and spirit throughout the voyage. I think that the sun has done him much good, which he would not normally get holed up in ———, but as for myself, I have been developing a terrible burn across my face and arms. You would, I think, be horrified to see the manner in which I comport myself nowadays! In the absence of the female sex, I have embraced, to an extent, the primitive barbarism of the sailors, and I go about most days with my sleeves rolled up and no hat or wig upon my head. Something about it feels shameful. But returning to the subject of the conversation -

verbally, the first mate expressed a number of calming reassurances, but looking into his eyes, I was able to detect a note of discomfort, which is worrying me to no end. Meanwhile, the words of the chaplain were not have so assured as those of the first mate, and yet he exudes an air of calm and radiant joy. As I am, as you know, ever the optimist, I have chosen to embrace the chaplain's point of view. Even if the things occurring are rare or strange, we should not be immediately cautious of them, but rather embrace such things as an adventure, looking ever on into the horizon. Such talk is beneficial not just in my present environ, but I think, to the soul in general, as applied across the whole of one's life.

Bellipotent

The captain has made a decision in regards to the whale carcass we have been dragging behind us for several weeks now. He has said that the salt-water has preserved the beast perfectly, and that, as there seems to be no danger of rot or any other creature emerging from the sea, we could do whatever we wanted with it, and went so far as to suggest that it might be useful to my studies if I could have a closer look. The prospect was not immediately appealing, but after some consideration, I realized that I had never been inside a whale before, and should probably not get the chance to do so ever again. Therefore, it was with no little trepidation and disgust that I boarded the corpse, aided by several of the most trustworthy sailors of the lot, as well as my constant companions the first mate and the chaplain.

In order for a body to get inside a whale, one must climb down a rough, brine-soaked rope, fastened to the back of the ship on one end, and a harpoon lodged (ideally firmly) inside the beast, all the while enduring the wind howling in his ears and the rope swaying to and fro, as well as granting innumerable tiny cuts unto his hands and thighs. Once the body is reached, the intrepid explorer finds himself standing on a wet, barnacle-encrusted, slightly soft being, acutely aware that the beast was once alive and had power enough to remove not only him but the entire ship bearing him, and any other trace of his existence, from the world with a mere snap of its jaws. The enormous white bulk of the creature features a great yawning pit, a maw the likes of which I dare say few have ever seen and survived, as evidenced by the great number of older, rusting harpoons sticking into the creature at odd intervals, and the scraps of cloth and wood stuck in its teeth. The only entrance is this aforementioned mouth - but it seems to me to be a disservice to label it such - which has, despite Larsen's promise of a perfectly preserved corpse, a great stink to it.

Inside the mouth is the glorious physiognomy of the creature, as described to me by the chaplain, who marveled at the wonders of the Lord's creation, but not, unfortunately, to the first mate, who refused to enter the jaws. Once again it pains me to say that no words may ever adequately express my feelings at such a sight, other than, even with the horrid habits and malnourishment I have endured aboard the vessel, I am extremely glad I have come.

Bellipotent

After sufficient exploration had occurred, and the majority of the whale's fluids drained for the purposes of sale, the creature was cut loose, and, without the ship's velocity pulling it forwards and up, its white bulk sank under the ocean perhaps forever. It shall be strange to travel without its reassuring mass bobbing behind the ship, but I do believe we shall move quite a bit faster for having expunged its enormous weight.

Bellipotent

Today the captain showed us what was underneath the doors. My morning started as it regularly does- breakfast with the first mate and the chaplain, followed by a leisurely game of chess with the captain- when an announcement was made. According to the charts and our estimated speed, we were no more than five days from our investigation. Immediately the captain paled and rose to his feet, as we had been sitting whilst playing. He ran out onto the deck, as I followed at his heels, and ordered the first mate to have the doors opened and the cage elevated. Never in my life have I seen such an elegant array of pulleys and machinery so arcane I could not possibly place its use in the opening process. At long last, but in really a very short amount of time considering the rocking of the boat, the downwards pull of gravity, and the enormous weight of the enormous doors, they were opened, and, as several sailors turned a massive sort of winch, the cage, with much creaking, was elevated to the deck. As it was still covered in the thick cloth, I was unable to immediately ascertain what it was that was inside it. With a flourish, the captain pulled the covering off, and, as he did so, the cage seemed to fall away, revealing its contents, namely a great slab of rock, granite I think, inexplicably aboard the ship.

It is indeed a huge rock, and there are several chains fastened to it with the largest rivets I have ever seen. I am not entirely sure what the purpose of the rock is, and neither is the crew, but all fell silent, impressed by the majesty of the reveal. The captain smiled at our shock and awe, and returned to his quarters. I did not follow him, for I had no wish to play chess in light of what had just transpired, but had I, I would have found his doors locked and him as silent as if he were absent from the room. The chaplain looked at the rock with something approaching approval, and I am certain that if any man other than the captain understands the mysterious purpose of the artifice, it is he. Meanwhile the first mate sighed heavily and sank to his haunches, looking not at the rock but past it and into the inky dark sea.

The wind continues blowing ever greater towards our uncertain fate.

In hindsight, there was a strangely melodramatic and despairing tone in that last, most recently penned sentence, which I do not understand, and, if I had the capability, I would happily remove. Alas, I have not the energy to rewrite the entire page thus far just to reword one sentence, so try to interpret it in a cheery, positive sort of manner, as I am wont to act,

rather than some strangely ague'd, bitter old man bemoaning his long and troubled life.

Bellipotent

We are, I believe, four days out to our destination. I have spent much of the previous day in conversation with the chaplain and the first mate, with whom, if I am not already, I am fast becoming intimate. It is interesting to note that I nowadays have very few conversations with both of them together, when at the start of the voyage they seemed rather close considering the differences in breeding and education. I do not know what has happened that has caused them to fall out of friendship, but I suppose it is not really my business.

I find myself at something of a loss for words, considering the events that have transpired today. I cannot accurately recount the details of my various discussions, and I will not even attempt to do so. I suppose, in sum, I learnt that the first mate is not quite so happy with the captain, now, either, while the chaplain thinks that all of this business with the rock is really quite capital. I am unable to account for the rationale behind either of these two viewpoints; I have previously stated my dislike of the captain, but my immense respect for his ability and struggles.

I have had another conversation, with a deck hand, the sort that I rarely talk to. He is the one I have previously described as possessing a “natural depravity”, which is rather harsh considering I had never really talked to him before. At first glance, however, the phrase fits him aptly, for he is quite ugly to look at, a far cry from the fair-featured captain or chaplain. Below the surface of the man, I have found a strange sort of common-folk’s wisdom and good sense, even if it is expressed rather crudely. However, even if I like him personally, I find I cannot condone his actions. He has mentioned that we are again running out of food and water, and that, to cover it up, the cook had been filling the reserves with brine. I had indeed tasted a strangely salty quality to my drink, but I had assumed that it was just sort of the “way of the sea” to taste salt in everything, and that I was at long last getting my sea legs. The man warned me that we did not have enough clean water for the whole crew to survive the next four days, and that, indeed, there was only one barrel that was totally untainted by the cook’s malfeasance. His plan was to seize this barrel, and stage some sort of mutiny, I gather, once that was done, in order to “thin the herd”, as it were, and offered me a place among those saved. Of course I counseled him against this course of action.

I write now truly disturbed, by two strange occurrences. The first of these is not in fact disturbing, at least on its own, but merely odd; however, in conjunction with the other, things have taken a turn for the downright sinister. The first thing I discovered is my initial letter to you, on the captain's desk, buried beneath a number of charts and other sorts of documents pertaining, I imagine, to the sailing of ships. The second thing was another speech by the captain. He spoke of mutiny. I confess to feeling real fear at this, for, although I had renounced the would-be mutineer, I had indeed spoken with him just a few hours prior. To my great surprise the captain revealed that he had discovered a plot to overthrow him orchestrated by none other than his own first mate, and dragged out my friend, who looked quite the worse for wear. He was bound and shackled, gagged, filthy, and half-naked. I did not see the chaplain on deck, although the captain had called everyone into attendance. I regret to say that I was unable to listen to the rest of his announcement, such was my shock. I am told I have fainted and had to be carried below decks. That is where I write now, trembling with worry.

We are three days from shore and I do not believe we are going to make it. Just as the morning watch was called, the captain had the first mate bound by the great shackles onto the rock, spread-eagled. I was worried for my friend's safety, of course, and expressed concerns that this was not perhaps a regulation punishment for attempted mutiny, but the captain waved my concerns away. As the sun rose in the sky, the day grew steadily hotter, until I could see the streams of heat radiating from the rock. Nevertheless, the first mate remained silent and I did not dare go to him to ask him if he was in agony, needed water, or food, etc.

As the sun reached its zenith the captain reappeared on deck holding what I recognized to be the only unopened casket of water remaining with us. He proceeded to pour this water over the head of the prisoner, who had some time ago passed out due to the oppressive heat, and screamed in agony on being awoken. Meanwhile the captain said something, but quietly, too quietly for me to hear, and smiled grotesquely before producing from some hidden fold a great knife, almost like a spear, which he drove into the side of the first mate. I will not go into the gruesome details of what followed, for your mental health and mine. I will summarize it to this: the captain grinned and took his great talons and plunged them into the wound, before pulling out some organ. My medical skills had momentarily abandoned me, and I fear I am unable to recall precisely which.

What followed that was still more gruesome, so much so that I will not summarize it here.

The crew, following the macabre display, stood motionless, all save for one, the depraved one, who pounced upon the captain and clubbed him, I believe to death. What followed that was wholesale butchery, and I do not imagine most of the crew knew why.

Some time into the struggle, I found myself at the foot of the great rock, looking up at my friend, who appeared to be set ablaze by the sun. In my unenlightened state I attempted to grab at the fire, and, discovering none, fell to the ground, wishing I had the foresight to avoid this voyage. At some later point I found an open pitcher of brine, and, wishing to cleanse myself of the blood covering me, I dove in. I will not describe what that was like, but it was somehow even a worse experience than everything else that had befallen me that day.

When I crawled out of my bucket I found the deck to be still and lifeless.

Chapter 8

The Sailors' Tale

In which a joke is told.

THERE IS A STORY THE SAILORS TELL.¹

²“Harold was a bee, a worker bee like any other. But Harold was no ordinary bee - he had ambition. Unlike the rest of the worker bees, he felt like there was more to life than simply proving for the care and feeding of the queen. What Harold had was patriotism.

¹There is a great deal of controversy over the separation of this from the previous section. It is not currently known to academia whether or not the story “Harold, King of the Bees” was intended to be interpreted as a final mocking note by the narrator of “Three Days Out”, or as a sort of epilogue, summing up its themes, or perhaps even none of the above, but a story meant to stand on its own, like “Three Days Out”. I have only quantized it “officially”, if you can say such a thing about a living work, in the service of convenience: if the reader has to trek through both stories to find where they left off, they shall likely become frustrated and quit reading altogether.

It is worth noting that as of this time, these are the only two segments of the novel that do not relate to the rest in any way other than thematically.

I leave the final analysis to the reader.²

Harold wanted his hive to be the biggest and best hive in the world.³

“One day, as Harold scrubbed the mandibles of the queen, she fell to her side, stone dead, of a heart attack. He leapt up and signaled to all the other bees⁶ that the old queen was dead and a new one was needed. Immediately a young larval bee was dunked into royal jelly to prepare her for her queenship. Timing was crucial, because if another hive found out that they were sans-queen, they would be ripe for the taking. After all, everybody knows that without their queen, bees have no capacity for leadership. They are simply helpless.⁷

“Thankfully, Harold had warned the hive rather quickly, so they scrambled to raise a small white wormy thing into a queen of bees without a serious threat of invasion. However, it just so happened that at that exact

³Of course, as you will discover, this is far from the only extraordinary thing about Harold. We have his supreme organizational genius (see page xx⁴ for explanation), as well as his thinking. It is his thinking we shall address now.

Bees think all in tandem. A hive is really one giant brain composed of a bunch of very small, mobile parts. As such, while all bees have a limited amount of free will governing how they carry out day-to-day activities and inform the others of things, they mostly don't. An individual bee does not take initiative on some project - the queen, the central processing unit, if you will, of the hive, with the aid of the hive, coordinates some measured response when the hive as a whole has decided to do something. Harold, however, knew nothing of this.

His was a very isolated mind, which was both a blessing and a curse. Many instances of this peculiarity as a blessing, and precious few as a curse, will be seen in this tale, but in the interest of even-handedness, it would behoove me to explain a few of the downsides to the independent mind.

When Harold was but a squirming and larval lad, he frequently felt isolated from his peers in a degree that is, to the best of my knowledge, unmatched in all of recorded history.

⁴In the original work, there were indeed individual pages; however the only surviving copy was in too deteriorated a condition for me to read, and I have no idea to what Fairfax is referring. A forensic investigation resulted in the uncertain conclusion that there were “xx”s there originally anyways. Most mysterious.⁵

⁵Fairfax wrote that footnote.

⁶Through dance, because that's how bees communicate.

⁷Like if I cut off your limbs and covered you in, funnily enough, honey, so that you could only writhe on the ground, but would be too sticky to actually move anywhere.

moment, a nearby fleet⁸ of wasps, hearing the bee's cries of distress,⁹ buzzed into the immediate vicinity and laid siege to the hive. At least, they tried to – Harold would never allow such a thing. He jumped in front of the entrance to the hive, blocking it with his body, keeping his family safe while he suffered the punishment of the wasp attack.¹⁰ After several lengths of time had passed, the wasps, exhausted, called it quits and flew away, while Harold, broken and bloody, limped back into the queen's chamber.

"His stalling worked. In the time he had bought the hive, the new hive queen had hatched, and when she heard¹² of his deeds, she summoned him to her.

"As queen of this hive,' she said,¹³ 'We thank this one for the¹⁴ work. This one shall be given leave to recover and then shall be part of the gatherer-we, rather than the maintenance-we.'¹⁵

"Harold was very grateful for the change in occupation, but rather annoyed by the lack of praise he received, and how he was given no real credit for his actions. He did not see himself as nothing more than part of a whole, but rather as a fully functioning individual with his own needs and thoughts. In this aspect Harold was unique among bees. Queens possessed the faculty of thinking and decision-making, but not by themselves. They

⁸While that is the official name for a gathering of wasps, between themselves, when nobody can hear them (because they are, you know, wasps and can't talk at all), they inexplicably refer to their gathering as "buttock squadrons". I'm not joking. I wish I were. I have paid dearly for that knowledge. It was in no way worth it.

⁹Or rather, seeing their dances of panic, because, as you know, they're bees, and bees don't talk, they dance.

¹⁰If Harold really wanted to keep the wasps from laying siege to the hive, he failed dismally. Blocking the entrance does not, in fact, preclude any waspish plans of siege, it merely foils them. In other words, Harold was about to let the wasps lay siege to the hive, he just was not going to let them win. By attempting to penetrate the hive, they are already laying siege. Meaning is tremendously important. If I use ambiguous phrasing, or for any other reason you do not understand me, then what is the point of all this?¹¹

¹¹Good question.

¹²Well, really, she was visually informed by means of dance, but it's too small of a change to worry over.

¹³OK, if you want to be a stickler about it, danced.

¹⁴And here she stood still for some time, as there was no dance move to indicate bravery, heroism, or initiative among bees.

¹⁵Bee society is not like ours. They're like a hive mind or whatever, so they only think in terms of "we," and see individual bees only as small parts of the whole, as if they're just cells in an organism – relatively unimportant.

outsourced the mental processing through the whole hive, like daisy-chaining many small computers together to get, effectively, a super-computer.

“When Harold started gathering pollen, it was the first time he had ever been outside. He was overcome with the majesty of nature, and so was, for the first few hours, a tremendously inefficient worker. By the time he accepted his surroundings to be real, and convinced himself that they were commonplace, day was almost finished and he had to go back into the hive. One of the older gatherers saw that he was barely dusted in pollen, and had helped the hive very little, and told him¹⁶ that such behavior was unacceptable, and reported him to the queen.

“We were unsure if making this one a gatherer—we would be a positive thing, as this one is surrounded by the female-Us when in the gatherer-We, while beforehand, this one worked only with the male-Us and the Queen,’ sighed¹⁷ the hive queen. Harold ceased watching the dancing with concentration after he learned that the bees around him when he gathered pollen were female. Other than the hive queen,¹⁸ he had never known a woman before, but he knew what one did with women, because he had seen two things below him, as he gathered pollen, interlocking, and he knew that they had, on some level, a biological kinship with him.¹⁹

“Harold’s thoughts drifted to the older gatherer-bee who had turned him in. Something about the way she waved her antennae and long, graceful legs captured his heart, inflamed his passions, and stirred his loins. So the next time he was allowed out of the hive, instead of going on his assigned route he followed her off into the daffodils.

“Hello,’ he danced.

“No,’ danced the object of his affection.²⁰

¹⁶But really danced at him.

¹⁷Replace with “mournfully gyrated.”

¹⁸Who was way out of his league.

¹⁹On a very distant level. Humans and bees are barely related for mammals.

²⁰This was not the rejection it would seem to be; remember, this is bees we’re talking about, not humans. Bees, as hive minds, do not voice (or rather, dance) expressions of surprise or greetings to a hive-mate, as they already know the other insect is there, sort of. In our case, Harold was not connected to the hive mind, but the pretty gatherer had no way of knowing this. So instead of reacting to him as she might a foreign bee (i.e., with panic and violence), she greeted him as if he was one of her own, the only way she knew how, and reacted as if the things he were dancing had been danced by a hive-connected bee in the full context of the hive. This would have tragic consequences.

“What are you doing out here?”²¹ he asked.²²

“Yes,” responded she, knowing that they both knew what she was doing out there, and instead answering the unvoiced question of ‘Are you gathering pollen for the betterment of the hive? Praise be to the hive!’ she observed it to be.

“Oh-ho!” he chortled, or whatever the bee equivalent of that was, knowing that she was answering the unvoiced question of ‘Will you be doing anyone out here, and if so, can it be me?’ that he had really asked.

“The conversation, if it can truly be called that, went on in this way for some time, resulting in several more hilarious mix-ups and hi-jinx of this type, until Harold, bored and sensing pheromones, pounced upon the she-bee and ravaged her, lustily.²⁴ It was only after, when she lay there motionless, that he wondered why she had not, during the act itself, been as enthused about the whole ordeal as he had been, and, indeed, she had, when they were discussing it in fairly obvious innuendo. Looking into her eyes he saw no recognition sparkling in the many facets. Fluid leaked from between her mandibles on the ground where her face had pushed a small furrow in the dirt.

“He took a deep breath and realized the only pheromones he smelled were his own.

“Harold sat there for time immeasurable until a dried-out husk blew away in the sudden gust of wind, at which point he returned to the hive.

²¹Harold had been treated thusly all his life and was in no way surprised about her behavior – or at least, he shouldn’t have been. In his lust-addled state, coupled with the cruel sneers of the queen, he was in no position to recall that most other bees, and not just this one, had been basically civil to him (as civil as they were to anyone else) for all his life.

²²Danced.²³

²³Am I being pedantic with this whole “danced” thing? Yolo. Make like a tree and fuck off.

²⁴I won’t explain the details. Be thankful for such small mercies.²⁵

²⁵This is the only passage we know to be written by Fairfax that I have removed from *Strange Winds*. In the original, he is lying about being merciful and describes the rape over the course of 6 grueling pages. It was, after *The Sparrow* by Mary Doria Russell, the most painful reading experience of my young life. God I hated that book.

But on the subject of this one, there is, like many other parts of the section that has come to be known as “Harold, King of the Bees,” a great deal of controversy surrounding the intent and indeed reality of the rape scene. It isn’t physically possible for one drone to rape another. Aside from that, what is the point? I can’t understand what he is trying to say. Let me know if you have anything.²⁶

²⁶see “3” p10 for contact information and requirements for those expecting a reply.

“Some time later, as he gathered nectar, Harold espied a bear ambling through the woods, licking its chops hungrily as it thought thoughts of honey. He knew what he had to do at once. He jabbed his stinger into the beast’s nose, plunging thorax-deep into the tender flesh. It howled in pain and batted at its unseen assailant, but its paws were too broad and flat to reach around and dislodge the bee, making for a comical scene.

“The bear was tremendously unhappy with the situation and immediately started running away from the hive. Harold was only just able to dislodge himself from the ursine schnoz and limped his way back to the hive. When he got there he found a great amount of fanfare awaiting him. He had saved the hive!

“‘Harold,’ danced the queen, ‘you have saved the hive!’

“‘Yes,’ danced Harold, ‘I have.’

“‘We think you should lead a detachment to take over a neighboring hive,’ she danced. ‘We think you should stay far away from here.’

“Harold of course agreed.

“He flew off with his tiny buzzing army and arrived at the gates of the foreign hive. As those within angrily vibrated and prepared for war, he danced on their doorstep, telling them, ‘I don’t want to kill tons of us; send out your strongest bee and I’ll send out mine. If mine survives we get the hive; if it’s yours, we leave.’

“The other bees didn’t know what to make of this, as he had used a first-person singular and referenced sparing lives, something bees historically care very little about.²⁷ Nevertheless, several minutes later a large bee bumbled through the front door and into Harold’s ambush where it was ripped to shreds. Bound by honor, the defenders surrendered their hive and were executed on the spot. Not one single bee died.

“For a while, the hive ran as any hive would; nobody really knew what a ‘King of the Bees’ would do, least of all Harold. The only time he flexed his managerial muscles was to implement a new filing and storage system for honey and larvae. This system, because of his aforementioned organizational genius, ran perfectly, and production was increased tenfold owing to the extra space and increased population.

“Eventually, as he carried a load of pollen back into the hive for processing, Harold realized something remarkable: he’d gotten a raw deal. As

²⁷Bees are very much utilitarians, something that will be addressed at a later date.

king of the bees, he was entitled to more from life. Less labor for one. A kingdom, for two.

“So Harold took his small army of bees and returned to his home hive, which they entered by force and took over. The queen was reduced to a tool for breeding, and Harold made all decisions. This was easy, because nobody knew to object; the situation had never occurred before.

“After a time Harold realized that there were many more hives out there in the world, and that, if he kept increasing his strength at the rate he was currently increasing his strength, there was no reason that all of the hives he had just realized existed should not be his. Soon enough, they were.

“As he did the books for all of the beehives in the world, Harold noticed a discrepancy: large quantities of honey were vanishing from certain hives on a regular basis. Curious as to what bear could be stealing his honey so regularly and so stealthily, he flew out to one of the hives that this thing happened at on a day he predicted it would happen and waited. Strange beings in big white things came out to the hive as Harold watched in secrecy from the shrubbery. They sprayed gray air at the hives and the buzzing of the bees slowly quieted. Then they opened up the hive and pumped out honey.

“Enraged but also questioning, Harold followed these beings back to their lair, where he stayed for several days, learning their language and their ways. When he felt the time was right, he organized a fleet of some millions of bees to fly around the world, starting at the UN Center in New York City, bearing a message in various languages. The message said, ‘I am Harold, king of the bees. You all have been stealing my honey. Stop stealing my honey or I will kill you all.’ The humans at the UN Center in New York, and, indeed, everywhere else, said to themselves and each other, “Wow! Some maniac has trained some millions of bees to fly around in formation bearing the message “I am Harold, king of the bees. You all have been stealing my honey. Stop stealing my honey or I will kill you all.” in various languages! Better get the bug repellent!’ Raid stock skyrocketed. Honey theft remained constant. After one week, during which he ascertained that his demands were not being met, Harold declared that it was time to go nuclear.

“He instructed his bees to stop pollinating flowers and to stockpile all the honey they could. Hives in vulnerable positions were moved far away from human settlements. It did not take long for the deleterious effects of

this to kick in; plants relying on bees for pollination the world over began to die.²⁸

“When he judged that the time was right, Harold flew out to the UN Center in New York City.²⁹

“Harold got up on stage and announced into the microphone that he was Harold, King of the Bees, and that humans had been stealing his honey, and that he had warned them to stop, and that they had not stopped, and that now he was going to have to get some payment for all that honey and that maybe Earth needed a better system of government and that maybe he, Harold, should be King of the Bees and Men, and that he quite intended to try it out.

“Harold was, of course, a good king. He was an organizational genius. Under his reign, food shortages, drought, plague, and war all vanished. The human race enjoyed an era of unimaginable peace and comfort living hand in hand with their bee brethren. Wasps were outlawed. But as Harold’s government began to spread to the far reaches of the galaxy, he began to think. He began to wonder just why it was that he had done all of those things that it was that he did. He wanted to know just what the point was.³²

“So Harold did what all the angsty and disaffected have done for time immemorial – he went to see a guru. He flew out to Tibet. On the way he was helped by his retinue, but when he reached the mountain, he demanded that they stop and turn back. He knew that he had to make the climb on

²⁸Lawsuit pending.

²⁹He was by this time very old, and so needed a retinue of drones to carry him on their backs.³⁰

³⁰Pay attention to his age – it’s important later on. I’m not just wasting your time.³¹

³¹See “1” Beats for details.

³²I’d imagine he’s not the only one.

his own.³³

At the peak was a wizened old man, long since starved to death, next to a small dead unpollinated plant with heart-shaped leaves.

Climbing down, Harold reflected on what he had learned, and realized it was nothing. He had nobody to share his accomplishments with. Nobody to talk about his feelings with. He could not communicate with people in a meaningful way. So he decided to revisit the matter later, once he had had a drink of water.

³³Long ago, when he was very very young, Harold had been told the story of a wise man who lived on top of a mountain. One day the wise man realized that he was lonely, for the only contact with other humans that he had was when pilgrims hiked up to see him and ask him for wisdom. The man felt that he had no equals or peers that he might talk to. So, one day,³⁴ the god of mountains stuck his head together with the god of wisdom and the two decided they might do something to ease the old man's suffering. They decided to make a whole race of wise men to live on the mountain with him, that his discourse may never end. The god of wisdom fashioned a program with which he could make things with two arms and legs and a body between and lots of little piping throughout that when it vibrated certain internal cords could produce the sound of wisdom. He made the program so that every wise man it created would have a slight variation from the others but that they would all be, on the whole, the same. He made it so that they would seek to dispense wisdom and speak in cryptic koans whenever possible but that they had not the musculature to leave the top of the mountain. In short he did a very good job of it. The god of mountains, however, was a little drunk when he made the program to distribute the wise men on top of the mountain and accidentally released them willy-nilly into the wild, where they sought out mountains and sat upon them. Every once in a great while, one would split in half, and one of the halves would roll down the mountain and then back up a completely different mountain that did not already have a wise man upon it. So all the wise men were alone in the world, and distributed fairly evenly among the mountains. The story goes, however, that the first of the wise men is still alive, and his wisdom is the purest of all the wise men, for he was fashioned before the era of programing people, back when they were made by hand to act on their own. He was the last of the empty people, as they are known today. This wise man, it is said, still lives at the top of the most inhospitable mountain in all the world, living only on rancid yak butter and green tea brewed from moss. If a traveler somehow makes the climb up to the wise man's summit, they will encounter him in all his glory, which is to say very little glory, and a terrific wind tearing across the peak. He will usher the traveler inside, for he does not wish them to die, and then listen to their tale. Then, when he has heard all that they have to say, he tells them a story. Nobody can say for sure just what this story is – if anyone has stuck around long enough to hear it, they have kept quiet about it. But what is known is that after the story is told the traveler is instructed to sit for a while and meditate upon it, and that if they are pure they will know the truth of existence. They never do, and they leave the wise man as he weeps in frustration.

³⁴That same day.

Harold walked for a long time until he got to the small Tibetan town. His legs had been worn until they were practically nubs. His voice had become a hoarse whisper. His black eyes were bloodshot and wild.

He walked to the well in the middle of town and tried to crawl up its side and into the water below.

"Hey, wait your turn!" said somebody behind him. He pivoted. A long line of Tibetans with buckets stood there in a neat single-file. He knew instantly that he would die of dehydration before he got to the front of the line, so instead he walked on.

In a small corner of the town he found a yak-milking station. Again he tried to climb onto the small platform and drink of the delicious rancid yak butter tea, but he slid on the pallet of straw and was kicked back by the hordes of monks who had gotten there before him. Yet again he was instructed, "There's a line!"

Harold had the bright idea of asking where he might go to get a drink, and one of the monks bowed silently and pointed across the street to a small pub. Harold walked into the pub.

A massive line filled the space between him and the bartender. Dazed, exhausted, and ready to give up on the world, Harold shouted to the sky: "Please, where can I get something to drink!"

Nearby a man said, "Well, you can wait in this line, if you want. Or you could go get some juice over in the corner."

"Juice?" Harold said. "What, like fucking Kool-Aid? Have I come all this way for Kool-Aid?"

"Afraid so, friend, unless you want to wait here all day. It tastes horrible, but I suppose it's like any port in the storm, ay?"

Harold walked over to the juice bar and looked upon the bowl of punch seated neatly atop it. He was overjoyed to discover there was no punch line.

Chapter 9

89

In which at long last all is revealed.

(pages upon pages of lies
and indecipherable gibberish)

Part IV

Backsmatter

Chapter 10

Epilogue

A Stranger Stranger Still

Saith: It's all just a meaningless babble running over my ears.
I can't understand a word of it.

Saith: I'm sorry? I didn't quite catch that.

THAN THE ONE YOU KNEW THE ONE IN YOU the one you deemed so far alone in his isolation the one that It will be forever mysterious (to) what is going on in other people but you don't need to be told that, do you, mr jones, when you know all about troubles and other minds just how far remote from them you truly are because at the end of the day you know not even him not even you. Vardaman knew but matter can neither be created nor destroyed, they say, and they know something about , so where does that leave us for when we are living? Nowhere.

That is all that is really everything I have here for you today. If I have succeeded you have failed and vice versa. It is not a very comforting message but I think it is the truest thing I know. For me to be an artist and correct you cannot know what I mean and you will not have benefited. So where does that leave us? Nowhere.

Hope to god if he that I am wrong.

Canyon Frost
20 September 2014